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### **Watershed August 2009 Podcast**

Lars von Trier's **Antichrist**, which I touched on in last month's podcast with Father Robert King of Clifton Diocese, continues this month. I would be interested to know your thoughts on the film if you managed to see it. Or if not you have a few more days, well certainly at Watershed you have. It may well be about to arrive in a cinema near you!

We tried a successful experiment with the film. Recording or rather inviting the audience to record their views after watching it. This was lo-tech which in itself is interesting. Using post-its and a hastily gathered noticeboard we asked for immediate feedback from people - preferably in 1 post it sized space. A bit like a real world Twitter. The idea being to get something spontaneous - of course there is always one who will break the rules and gather together a handful and start an essay. The response has been remarkable and indicates both the range and the depth of feeling for the film. Here are some examples:

"Effective, provocative, but extremely pretentious."

"Uncomfortable, traumatic, unflinching, familiar, unrelenting."

"Superb cinematography."

"I was very scared and wasn't sure I could sit through it but actually it wasn't as scary as I thought and I enjoyed it. Very beautiful. (A Girlie)"

"Pretentious and boring."

"Loved Charlotte Gainsbourg, hated Willem Dafoe."

"I like it. No idea what certain elements mean - the last shot was a prime example. But cinematography was stunning, performances

strong, and von Trier remains one of the most thought-provoking filmmakers.”

“Needs more talking foxes.”

And we also have evidence of people reading these comments from their peer audience members and deciding they will go and see the film which critics and the media have decidedly put them off. In my view **Antichrist** is 3 seconds of sex, 5 seconds of mutilation and 1hr 44 minutes of intense haunting beauty.

I mentioned elsewhere that for me it was interesting seeing the film in Cannes. It was the first screening and all I knew was that it was Lars von Trier's new film and it was in the horror genre. Those two facts alone lead to all sorts of intriguing possibilities and your imagination running in all directions. In a festival like Cannes the journalists have not had time to impress on you their views, prejudices or approach. You are seeing the film without a critical safety net.

I remember being profoundly moved by the opening, there is a very small scene after the prologue where Willem Dafoe and Charlotte Gainsbourg follow their son's funeral cortege which is just the most devastating representation of inconsolable grief. It is almost a throwaway scene yet extraordinary in its craft and meaning. I was stunned by the beauty of some of the sequences especially the dream sequences of Gainsbourg in the woods and shocked by the mutilation. I cursed von Trier for putting that image in my head. The critics went ballistic for the latter. It was difficult not to find a journalist who was playing into the court jester element of the director's personality.

I watched the film again at our press show a couple of weeks ago and what struck me was how stunning the film is as a piece of cinema and

how in actual fact the sensational moments fit meaningfully and coherently within the narrative and plot of the film. By this time it was too late - the film had already been pigeonholed by journalists and some film critics as repulsive, degrading etc etc. The distributor and indeed the director playing positively to this front row. The image for the poster is from a sequence that is less than 3 seconds of the film.

So what am I saying: go and see **Antichrist** and make up your own mind, and for what its worth I think it is a work of cinematic sublime mastery. Yes its Lars von Trier's film, but it is equally cinematographer Anthony Dod Mantle's, who has shot a number of von Trier's other films and people may well know him more for Slumdog Millionaire. It is also Charlotte Gainsbourg and Willem Dafoe's film. Gainsbourg quite rightly gets the plaudits for an extraordinary brave performance but also Willem Dafoe's subtle and nuanced performance is also noteworthy.

And on that note I am off to dive into hundreds of short films to begin to piece together this year's **Encounters Short Film Festival**. Maybe I will come across the next, the new, the British Lars von Trier! If I do you will be the second to know.